

Congressman Blumenauer's Statement for the Congressional Record on H.R. 1540, FY12  
Defense Authorization:

Today I voted against the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012 (NDAA). While nothing is more important than providing the resources needed to keep America and our men and women in uniform safe, this authorization spends too much while falling short in important areas.

The bill authorizes \$690.1 billion for defense programs in FY12. This level of defense spending is almost as much as the rest of the world combined – most of which is done by friendly allies such as NATO (approximately \$350 billion). It also includes an additional \$118.9 billion in specific funds for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan without a plan for a full redeployment from the region. I am disappointed that amendments to require a rapid and thoughtful withdrawal from Afghanistan were not approved. For me, this is reason enough not to support this legislation.

The bill continues the misguided affront on civil liberties by further stalling the implementation of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," and requires that "marriage" for any regulation or benefit program at DoD means only a legal union between one man and one woman. This is a step backwards and unacceptable.

It reverses the House victory from earlier this year that finally eliminated the unnecessary alternate engine for the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter. Similarly, the bill continues to fund the Marine Corps' Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle (EFV) which has also been cited as uneconomical and unwanted by the Secretary of Defense.

Embarrassingly, this authorization contains two key provisions that continue to tie the President's hands by restricting his ability to transfer detainees to the United States for trial in Federal Court and to release detainees to countries willing to take them. It is absurd to think that the United States, which currently has thousands of dangerous criminals locked safely behind bars, is incapable of doing the same for terrorists. These provisions continue the Guantanamo quagmire which is ill-advised and a sign of failure at home and to those observing abroad.

There are many positive elements in the bill, such as new rights and protections for victims of sexual assault in the military and increased access to mental health providers for our Reserves. I am pleased three of my amendments were included in the legislation. One amendment lifts the veil on classified immunity for defense contractors, a practice that exposed 36 of our Oregon National Guardsmen to toxic chemicals in Iraq. The other two will help protect our troops on the battlefield and save billions of dollars through energy efficiency initiatives. Their inclusion, however, does not offset the overall authorization which fails to reflect America's priorities or our national security realities.

At a time when Americans are calling for reform, this bill – despite some positives – continues our operations in Afghanistan with no plan for withdrawal, ramps up spending and discriminates against our service members. I am hopeful that my colleagues in the Senate can remove some of the provisions that do little to make America secure while we continue to spend almost as much on defense as the rest of the world combined.